

Lipstick
By David Estrada

Chapter 1

"I was watching a movie once...well not exactly. I was listening to a movie from a closet in a hotel room. I had just finished a bottle of Jack and was pressing a glass pipe to my lips but the movie said, 'Every great story is about a woman'. This story is about two: Mercy and Starr. Mercy is a certifiable cunt. Starr, she has a temper like a cattle prod and a right hook that matches." Excerpts from a letter to my mother, I never mailed or finished it.

I love speed. This weekend I laid off it long enough to drink myself into a blackout. Right now I am flying down the 10 freeway headed east from Santa Monica. Passing Alhambra, I see a familiar street sign.

Right now waking up from my blackout, I notice that I'm driving. "Fuck! Where am I?" I mumble. "Calm down, Carl. Okay, what is the last thing I remember?" I begin to look around the car. "I need something to drink." I reach for a warm stale diet coke. "How long has this been here?" I take a long swig. Remember to roll down your window before you spit stale warm coke out. "Uh, warm. The artificial sweetener in diet drinks turns to a formaldehyde like substance when let warm while opened. Where's my Chap Stick?" I continue to mumble as I wipe the shit from my eyes. Where's my Chap Stick?

"Okay, the signs," I look around. "Ten freeway, there's Garfield, there's Atlantic. So I'm east bound on the Ten, currently in Alhambra. This cannot be good. I'm so fucked. The last thing I remember is..."

"I was having trouble sleeping. I took four of my girlfriend's Vico's and washed it down with a pint of jack." I lick my lips.

"Where's my Chap Stick? She left on a business trip last week. I quit asking where she's going. She said she'd bring back loads of cash. I quit caring how. Starr, she's a twisted hippie child. Her parents were hippies who converted back to Catholicism in the mid-eighties after five years of coke binges. Twisted. Her dad's a pharmacist. She told me this when we met. 'Hi, I'm Starr, My dad's a pharmacist!' It was true love."

"Where's my Chap Stick? What time is it? Better yet, what day is it? I'm going up a hill. Fog. Morning! Look at my shoes. That's not going to help. I gave Irving my Doc's for a couple grams of meth" I swerve to avoid a big rig. "Starr, Twisted bitch. A couple of weeks ago she told me that I could pass for Jesus, sunken eyes, ribs showing, greasy hair. Once in high school, she asked a priest if she'd go to heaven or hell for sucking Christ's dick. He said he didn't know but he'd certainly give her an A in the class."

"Where's my Chap Stick?"

Jacket pockets, no it's not there.

"Darvocet, Minithins. I'm passing Cal Poly Pomona. 57 exit ahead. Starr never lost faith in the church or the priesthood. She said that Father Alvarez was just a man not god and men do things for themselves. Traffic congestion on the freeway is increasing. Check jacket pocket. Two sugar cubes and a bottle of Percodan. She's been trying to get me to go to church. 'It could be really fun' she says. 'One tab of acid and a Seconal, the Lord does not want his children to have bad trips.'"

"Where's my Chap Stick? It's her fault. She introduced me to Irving. Check pocket. Camel Filters and lipstick. Seconal red lipstick. Irving's favorite color. Light a smoke. Stop, hold the presses." I hit the interchange unto the southbound 57 freeway. "If I didn't say this before, let me say it now, I'm so fucked. When you're driving you tend to believe no one can see you." A man looks over from his car at me and begins to laugh. The man is laughing so hard in fact that he drifts into the other lane and nearly hits a Mercedes.

"Starr introduced me to Irving about a year ago. He gave me a hug and would not let go. If he wasn't my new meth connect I would have punched him. Irving hates meth, loves men and dope. 'You tweakers'". I make the best Irving voice I wish you could hear it. "It's such a love hate relationship.' I'm trying not to laugh. 'fucking freaks! Do you know why most tweakers end up living in the desert. Paranoia. That car's following me, it's the cops. That guy is looking at me, he's a cop, cops cops cops. I may have to

drive farther but at least some innocent kids don't get killed when some lab explodes.”

“Where’s my Chap Stick? But meth is how Irving affords the finer things A Saab, syringes, fine silverware, an art-deco style lighter in the shape of a 1955 Thunderbird. He says the boys like it. Look kids Cal State Fullerton.” I light another cigarette.

“Check my pockets. A wad of cash and a sandwich bag half full of crystal. Somehow I can blame this all on Starr. Twisted bitch.” I jump on the westbound 91 freeway.

“The second time we went to visit Irving, our new best friend, she told me Irving thought I was cute. Check pocket. Last pocket in the jacket. Half eaten Snickers. Score, I haven't eaten in a week...”

“Stop. It's hard to slam on the brakes when you are wearing high heels.

I'd say I pissed my pants but I'm wearing a dress. It will be a million years 'til I slam into the back of this Mercedes. And even longer 'til I peel the air bag off my face. So while I defile this beautiful turquoise dress with a million sequins and a slit up to my ass, I'd like to thank the following people. I'd really like to thank Starr, for taking my Chap Stick, leaving me all her pills and especially for introducing me to Irving. Twisted bitch. I'd also like to thank Irving for this dress, these shoes, a wad of cash, meth and the lipstick. Fuck! Where am I?”

My Honda is smashed into the back of a Mercedes. I jump out of it and in my turquoise gown run through traffic and off onto the city street. And into the first men's clothing store I could find, which is off the 91 and Euclid in Anaheim. The Asian woman began to laugh hysterically at the site of me in full drag and a flight jacket.

Chapter 2

I approach the front door of a home with Starr in tow. It is not our home. We are not friends with anyone who may or may not be inside. It is noon. Starr has her black hair tied back. She is dressed in a blue cardigan with a black tee-shirt underneath. Her blue hip-huggers show off her midsection. She can't afford the jeans but she has a system. She goes into the clothing stores that most people who could afford these jeans would never go into, every morning. She buys one in her size each week but the other days she buys jeans in other sizes. She then sells them on the internet for a profit to lazy housewives. Clothes covered.

Starr sells make-up door to door. She sells the Divine Diva line of make-up. The company objective is to help you enhance your beauty through the convenience of home shopping. She does this three to four times a week. Rent covered.

Me...Well I tag along once a week on a special trip. This is one of those special trips.

I do the research into the homes. I know the times when more than one person is at home. What the neighbors do... Numbers of pets...

All of my expenses are covered.

Starr rings the door bell. The door at 222 W. Wilshire in Fullerton opens. An old woman lives there, Judith.

"Hi." Starr says. "I'm Jennifer from the Divine Diva Corporation."

Judith begins to close the opened door. Starr begins to say, "The objective..." Judith leaves a crack in the door.

"Why are you here?" She asks.

"The objective of the Divine Diva Corporation is to enhance your..."

Judith interrupts, "Are you saying I'm ugly."

“Ma’am, you are not ugly. I am doing this to make my way through college.”

Score! Judith opens the door and allows Starr in. I sneak around back as Starr enters the house.

Score! The back door is open. Starr has Judith at the kitchen table.

We are all looking for the way home. Most of us are seldom aware of this fact. Judith’s house smells. It smells like old...like rose scented perfume and old lady talc. I go up stairs. The thing with middle class people is that although they don’t have the most expensive jewelry they also don’t have safes or costume jewelry. Little old lady jewelry boxes sitting on an antique vanity table. After I get the shit in a black Jansport, I leave the same way I came in. Starr finishes her transaction and I drive away. She walks home. I go to visit Irving.

I’m sitting outside Irving’s house waiting for him and Ray, his boyfriend, to get home from the mall or perhaps antiquing or some other bullshit fags do. I have a bottle of cheap vodka in a brown paper bag between the driver’s and passenger seats. There was a time in this country where sexual perversion was kept secret now it’s out in the open. The drug addict is the new queer. We keep our nature a secret. Even if an addict quits it is always shameful to ever have indulged in excess. Any person worth living can moderate their intake of chemicals especially alcohol. College is for experimentation not exploitation or addiction. Fake your moods...fake your personality...faux you replaces faux fur.

There are two little girls playing on the street. They begin to laugh and pinky-swear. I imagine the Joy and Starr would have done that as children. They’ve known each other for that long. They came to be friends just after Starr’s mother died. I take a hit of the vodka...I nearly drink half of the fifth in the one little drink.

I’m guessing it’s a couple of days later because I woke up with a broken whiskey bottle in my hand. The dating game is on the television, Mercy must be home. Starr can’t stand when Mercy

comes to visit. Mercy, well Mercy is my roommate...She hates me. Starr must have gone out with Joy.

Well the dating game reruns are indicative that Warren has come over to break a piece off of Mercy. She's a fucking cunt. And she likes that Warren treats her like a cum-dumpster. It's nine in the morning and they are fucking on my couch. Warren finishes up and walks past me as though I were invisible. Mercy covers herself up.

"You're fucking gross Carl." She yells at me. "You can't look at me that way."

"I believe if it weren't physically possible to look at you that way, I couldn't do so."

"Fuck you, du..." Warren says from the kitchen.

Warren could be the Chinese Government's perfected clone of Bruce Lee. Something about his eyes because he shaves his head and most of his body is tattooed; nearly all of his body.

"It was nice to see you Mercy..." Warren says as he puts on his pants and leaves the apartment.

"Couldn't you do that...?" I say pointing at her room.

"Fuck you, Carl." Mercy gets up and goes into her room with a sheet wrapped around her. She slams the door.

It smells like whiskey in the kitchen. I must have hit Warren with the bottle. Fucker is built and a tough motherfucker. I go back into my room to check for some speed on the nightstand.

After I hit the pipe, I hit the shower. My stomach tends to hurt if I eat too much after smoking speed. I have a piece of bread and head to my other job.

My other job is in Santa Ana. I work for the county of Orange as a clinical psychologist. Three days a week I work as a psychiatric evaluator. I work on the PET team...We are the psychiatric evaluation team in central Orange County.

Most days are spent emailing mail order brides in Russia. I get so much spam that every once and a while I just decide to string them along. Usually they ask for money...it's a total scam. About every other day I get an email from Svetlana or perhaps Kseniya...

Kseniya thinks I work at a video store but today she is still asking for \$200. She needs to borrow it for rent...she lives with her parents and they had a family emergency. Her father had to take off work thus the shortage of cash.

Starr has no idea this is how I spend most of my time at work. She believes it's all about listening to patients and going on calls. No...no...most of my day is dead time. Sitting writing letters to men in Russia posing as women...my love endures forever; darling...I wish I could send you money so we can be together. My boss tends not to care as long as I can focus on my job. I click on send...to Russia with love.

I work 16 hour days. I get two hours in the middle to rest but since most of the time is down time anyway I just pass through it and continue with paper work and hit the pipe in my car as I go through the McDonald's drive thru. My boss is the psychiatrist for our location...she prescribes me sleeping pills for my insomnia.

I'm doing a balancing act on a couple of editions of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

"What are you doing?" Dr. Clein asks as she pushes the door to my office open. I have my IPOD on full volume...Bad Religion. This whole standing on books balancing helps me relax and think. Some people drive, draw, masturbate or whatever, I stand on DSM's. I nearly fall on my head...my boney ass breaks my fall.

"Thinking...I'm just thinking." I stammer or did I mumble? I leap to my feet and almost fall again. God hates me. I have a PhD in clinical Psychology and I act like a child...things should be different; I should be different.

“Are the sleeping pills helping?” She never waits for a reply. “You should take them for an extended period of time, they can be habit forming.” She closes the door as she leaves.

Funny, I think my first speed-connect told me the same thing back in college. There were no calls today and when I get home no one is there...relief. Mercy may be with Warren, Starr out of town and Joy hopefully dead on the side of the road...depressive bitch.

I have the next couple of days off and so I think it is downtime. I change out of my suit and into some blue jeans and a wife-beater. I hit the street for a leisurely walk to the corner market. I could afford a house but I prefer this apartment in Orange. It's off of Del Mar, near the corner of Tustin and Meats. I'm standing in front of a Bevmo store...they don't sell cigarettes so I run across the street to Target first.

She's beautiful, you know, Starr...I think of why I fell in love with her as I pick out some Jack Daniels and cheap vodka. I pay with a credit card...I need the cash to pay Hector. Before she left she was wearing a brown tank top and some black Capri's...

“I'll see you in a couple of days.” She yelled from the street below. I was hanging out the window spitting whiskey at her. She may have said she was going to Vegas...for a porn convention.

“Slut, cunt...you're fucking trash.” I almost fall out of the window, serves me right for telling this woman such things. Perhaps she doesn't take anything I say seriously. Who would take a drug addicted psychologist seriously...oh yeah, my colleagues and the patients I diagnose. I slip Hector a fifty as we stand behind the dumpster. I walk home...it smells like rotten whiskey and sex.

In this order I spend the next several hours: Open the window, open the vodka, roll a joint, smoke the joint and hit the bottle...close the window the cops can smell the pot. I hit another joint and finish off the vodka. It's smoky so I open the window and turn on a fan.

"I'm hungry." I say in a daze...

"Well, sir, you called Pizza Hut." I'm talking on the phone?

"Two of whatever specials you have."

"Forty-five minutes, can I get your name?" I'm still astonished I even got this far, usually they hang up or I just drop the phone and fall asleep with the munchies. I finish up on the phone and open a bottle of whiskey. I often crack the door in case I pass out.

Someone is knocking me on the head..."Sir, your pizza?" A confused delivery boy says. This guy has a huge fucking zit on his forehead.

"You have a huge fucking zit on your forehead."

"Thank you for noticing, like I don't already have a complex, asshole." He pulls the twenty out of my mouth and throws the pizzas into my lap. My thumb is in the neck of my whiskey bottle so I don't spill any.

That pimple fucked shit ran off with one of the joints I rolled before I passed out.

"Fuck you." He says running down the stairs into his running Toyota Four Runner. I pull my thumb out of my whiskey bottle and press the mouth of the bottle to my lips. I have puke on my boxers. My cock has chunks on it. It reminds me of getting blowjobs in college. The pizza boxes are sitting next to me, half open. There isn't any puke on them.

Getting to my feet I notice I only have one sock on...I'm a disaster. Wrecked and wretched, I place the pizza into the fridge. I take a piece out of the box and sit at the table. After I eat this one piece, I'm gonna look for that bottle cap.

Under the couch; no.

In the seat cushions; not so much.

At some point I pass out on the floor. At some point, a day later or so Mercy and Joy come in and begin to argue in the kitchen.

"Take the gun out of your mouth, Mercy." Joys says.

"I like the taste."

"No, no, no, you don't. I'm sure."

"This isn't one those cries for help." She mumbles as I fall in and out of consciousness. Speaking as a psychologist...it is a cry for help.

"What happened now?" Joy asks. I'm invisible to them right now.

"Work was shitty. My boss is going to fire me. Bill flaked on our lunch date and my mom is coming over." Mercy shoves the gun back in her mouth and mumbles "I want to die."

"Take the gun out of your mouth"

"No." Mercy is getting spit all over my gun.

"What happened last week...let me think" Joy puts her hand to her temple to signify she is thinking. "A co-worker critiqued your idea and your boss agreed with her."

"Yeah" the head nodding is really the signifier here because you can hardly understand Mercy with the gun in her mouth.

"What did you say it was," Joy tries to grab the gun but Mercy is too quick. "A conspiracy? Before we go any further you must take the gun out of your mouth. I don't translate mumbles very well." Mercy placed the gun under her chin.

"Better?"

"I would say so." Joy said.

I slip into unconsciousness. They continue to argue. Maybe Mercy is crying to the wrong person.

Chapter 3

What am I doing in bed? The last thing I remember I was lying on the floor; Mercy was trying to kill herself, again. The place doesn't stink. I jump to my feet.

"Starr?" I scream. "Are you home?"

No answer. She often doesn't answer when I ask stupid questions. Bitch.

"Yes, I'm home. Who else would clean your apartment?" She says as she walks into the bedroom with a cup of coffee.

"Thank you." I try to take the cup.

"It's not for you, douche bag." She sets it on the nightstand and punches me in the throat. "Asshole quit bringing that shit here." I fall out of bed choking. Usually my throat stays closed for a minute or so. I hate it when she does that. The larynx seizures when it is punched. "You're going to lose your job."

I get up from the floor.

I massage my throat. "Where's Mercy and Joy?" I cough.

"I sent them away." She slurped some coffee. "I came home to Mercy trying to kill herself, again."

She sat down on the edge of the bed. She drank some more coffee. Starr crossed her legs and I sat next to her. "Go to work." Starr got off the bed and walk out of the room. My head was banging. I looked for some remnants of the bottle of Jack I had been working on before I passed out, all I found were my clothes piled neatly at the end of my bed. The carpet was clean and free of any dirt, puked, piss or shit from this weekend. It's seven AM and I jump in the shower. As I brush my teeth my gag reflex kicks in and I puke into the sink.

My equilibrium is off and I fall over when I try to lace my shoes. I smash my face unto the vacuumed carpet and my nose begins to bleed. I walk back into the bathroom to shove tissue into my

nose. Somehow when I wasn't looking Starr came into the bathroom and began to clean up after me. I don't fucking get it.

"Who are you and what did you do with Starr?"

She doesn't answer. She never answers stupid question. "I'm going to sell make-up today and you are going to work to diagnose those sick, sick psychiatric patients who call the cops. You will stop picking up speed from Irving and weed from behind the dumpster over by the gas station."

Irving is my speed connection. He lives in a small blue house in Santa Ana. I used to live in that neighborhood. Starr and I moved out and today she's on a 'say no to drugs' kick.

"Quit killing yourself, asshole." She yelled as I walk out the door.

Mercy and Joy are in the hallway as I leave. They aren't arguing and the gun is gone.

"Mercy needs a ride asshole." Starr yells as she slams the door.

"Maybe she should get her own car."

Mercy follows me out to my car. "Where are you going, then?" I ask.

"With you." I open the door for her.

"You are going to work with me?"

"Carl?" Mercy says. "You are a good guy. I'm trying to help you get clean."

"You are one to talk. Warren was doing coke off your thighs the other night."

"Fuck you."

"No, get the fuck out of my car and go find my gun, cunt."

I drive to work, alone.

Chapter 4

I'm alone in my office going through some old case files. I slept the whole weekend. Starr must have come home after I passed out. I had been awake the entire week Starr was gone.

"We have a live one in Anaheim." My boss snuck into my office and scared the shit out of me. I nearly fall over. "Lets go...and Carl I have a script for some sleeping meds." She hands me a prescription for Ambien.

The first day we worked together she asked if I thought she was a bitch. I was high and completely paranoid at the time, so I tried to ignore such a stupid question. Who does this? 'Hi I'm your new boss and by the way do you think I'm a raging cunt?' 'Well I do, now. It's really nice to meet someone far more insecure and neurotic than a drug addicted psychologist.' I just buried my face in some case files and told her I was having trouble sleeping and too busy to go see my private doctor. It's been three years and like clock work she gives me a new script every two months.

A couple of months ago I was low on cheese and I complained about my leg. She gave me a script for Vicodin. My co pay was lower than a bag of speed from Irving and the Vicos are worth more to him. So I traded fifty pills for some speed. The script gave me one hundred but I kept half for when I needed to come down and get some rest.

Right now I imagine, Starr is selling make up. On the days that I'm at work, she goes door to door sales for Divine Diva cosmetics. She pretends to be a down and out student who moved to Orange County from back east or perhaps up north.

Weekdays was normal routine, sell cheap makeup to rich women who did not want to leave there house except for the gym or lunch. The markup was subtle...the shipping charge. I dropped the order off. The supplies were kept in my storage unit. When we need more, we ordered them from the warehouse. I would pick those up as well. The shipping charge was triple what it cost use to store, pickup and deliver the cosmetics. It was all done local. I

would park down the street where the customer could not see my car. I would be dressed in my old Fed-Ex uniform.

I worked my way through undergraduate school by keeping a delivery job with Fed-Ex. I enjoyed the driving and seeing things, being in public.

Secretly, I love Joy...We hardly ever speak and I think if Starr knew she would cut my cock off in the middle of the night. I would be like John Wayne Bobbitt in every way except Starr would throw my cock in the garbage disposal. I would be more like Hedwig with his angry inch. I watch Joy sleep sometimes. She crashes on the couch ever since I could remember. When we have breakfast in the morning I watch her eat. But we don't speak. The only time we ever spoke was eight years ago at Irving's.

One of the only times we had a descent conversation I was sitting in Irving's back yard and some Mexican girl is there rolling on E and some Special K...not the cereal, ketamine. She looked really familiar.

"What have you always wanted to do?" she asks me. I needed a trim and she was carrying scissors so I asked. I was trying to score some H that day I needed a come down after finals. I was on a run for the better part of the quarter. I slept on the weekends and my GPA was a solid 4.0.

"I would like a little hair cut." She ignored me at first and walked inside and when she came out she cut my hair.

It was one of the best days I ever had. Joy tells Starr everything and one day Starr showed up on my doorstep and moved in. Starr has been known to lie but she told me Joy needed a place to stay because she just moved here from France. Starr was the first person she met in the states. Starr told me one day that she went to primary school with Audrey Tautou...who the fuck is that. So Joy, the Mexican looking French chick, began to crash on my couch. She cries a lot. I think it is a French thing.

Starr is forceful but not totally psychotic. Mercy is the girl who trashes your life after she snubs your affections. She writes

suicide notes, calls the hotline and your parents crying. She tells you to fuck off and acts like...well like the no was really a yes. She trashed my mom's house after I gave her a present. I just wanted to cheer her up she just got home from a 72 hour suicidal hold that I sent her to.

Joy is far sweeter. She is the girl you take home to your mom if are one who speaks to his mother. But I just watch her. When I have my breakfast she smiles at me and passes me the milk. One day I asked her, if she was so sad why didn't she just move back to fucking France? She ran to the couch and turned on some movie.

Starr came out of the room and told me Joy can't go back.

"She left France to trying her luck in American movies." Starr slapped me before I could even get the next sentence out. What I would have said was that she was making quite the dent in American pornography. So Joy the sweet quiet girl who talks Mercy out of killing herself on a daily basis is addicted to party drugs and cock. Well she was addicted. Now she just cries a lot and helps Starr with her business. Her brother found one of her movies in the porn shop near there home in Pierrevet. Pierrevet is near Avignon. When she got the phone call from her mother and she was told to never come home, she stopped making movies. That was seven years ago.

She tried to do the right thing and send home money from each movie. She was really quite smart about the whole affair. Very clinical, just a great actress on screen, following the direction she was given. But now she just cries. I don't know if she feels shame for what she did on screen, with the drugs or maybe she just wanted so save face with her family. I never judged her, I'm just happy she isn't on heroin or a crack whore. It seems it was all down hill for her if she was bumming it at Irving's. After she quit the business she sent all of her money to France.

I follow my boss into the little house in Anaheim. On the DVD player is a Happy Valentine movie that was Joy's screen name.

Neighbors called about a man who hadn't been out of the house in several days. The police found him the bathtub.

Often, I'm not all there. But on the cover of this particular Happy Valentine movie, Joy was holding scissors, the title was Happy Endings. It was a porn horror, heavy on the porn...that's probably why she was holding those scissors all those years ago. But I was just a stupid drug addicted college student not the genius I am today. Today I'm a great psychologist. And the guy in the bathtub well his wife just left him and he shut himself inside for the last week.

He had been watching Valentine movies for the past week and crying...fucking pathetic. Who does that? Joy watches romantic movies and cries. I get that. Why didn't this dude send flowers or something...he just shut down. He could neither kill himself nor take care of himself.

Sometime after watching the movies and well...he came into the bathroom, drew a bath and slipped into a catatonic state for the past three days. Police found a loaded 9 mm on the table. Before the bath he was cleaning his gun, among other things. He wasn't actually cleaning that...waxing it maybe.

The ambulance arrived and took the man out of the tub. He'll spend a couple of days at the UCI medical center in Orange.

Chapter 5

I may have led you astray earlier. You may believe that I don't know where my gun is. I do know where my gun is. It is in my coat. I used to have a shoulder holster when I was in college. This freaked out most everyone who may have caught a glimpse of the butt of my nine millimeter. Soon after Starr moved in she sewed a holster into each suit coat I own. It was very quite simple for her and my gun would be completely concealed under my left armpit.

The gun is register and I have a permit to carry. I just think it is very unprofessional to carry and meet with patients. I don't want my boss to find out about my double life. I refer so many addicts to treatment facilities I just think about how bad it would be. It would be to get locked up in a treatment facility but that shit. I don't have a problem. I am educated enough to know the warning signs of addicted behavior.

I reach into my coat, open the Velcro flap and bring my gun out. Every time Starr comes home to find Mercy playing with my gun she puts it away in one of my coats and locks the closet. I should learn by now that leaving my coat on the couch is a bad idea. I'm in the parking lot of the Block of Orange. It is across the street from the UCI Medical center. I cock my 9 mm.

A couple of days ago I admitted a man to be held on suicide watch. No belt. No shoelaces...No personal possessions. Earlier I went to check on his case and much to my delight he was admitted for a month. No Happy Valentine movies for awhile Jim or does he prefer James.

I'm sitting in this parking lot, putting my Glock 9 back into my coat after I chambered a round for a very specific reason; I'm doing Irving a favor. I'm making a sale for him. I should know better. If I sell some speed Irving will give me a cut. I do this little something and I get some crank. It's really a nothing of a favor really I don't why I am sketching so much. Maybe it is speed psychosis...I should take another break. I'd tell myself I should quit but it is a hollow threat.

Knock. Knock. There is a knock on my window. I must have fallen asleep. I need more shit. This guy has a beanie and it's April. His face is dripping with sweat. This has to be my guy. He is some kind of genius.

"Roll down the window." He says as he puts his right hand in his pocket. I put my hand in my jacket. I use my left to roll down the window.

"Here you go." He pulls out a wad of cash and I produce a bag. I take the roll of cash and count it as I lay two eighths of speed on my lap.

Count, count, count.

"There you go." I hand him the eight balls and I drive away. Irving gave me an eight ball to do this. He didn't want to be bothered tonight. His new man was coming over. Irving goes through boy-toy's faster than a four-year-old boy goes through toy cars. Every couple of days some new toy comes home from some club.

What can I really tell my dealer about his lifestyle? He sells me drugs. If I piss him off with some self righteous bullshit he cuts me off. What he does with his cock is his business. And his other business is to supply me with shit. Earlier I was his bitch. I was doing for Irving what so many men have done for him before, doing a little job. Tonight I came out ahead.

I drive to Santa Ana to meet with Irving. I hand over his cash...count, count, count...He hands over my eight ball. I'm sitting on his couch. Some Asian kid in purple hot pants is giving Irving a back massage on a purple colored portable massage table.

The speed is for later, I took a couple of vicos earlier and now I'm finishing a pint of vodka. Irving may let me crash on his couch. I need a day or so away from Starr and Mercy. I'm trying to get rid of Mercy but she just keeps coming back. Starr is in school, part time. Some days Joy goes with her. Once or twice in the two

years Starr has been in school Mercy tried to follow her. My poor girl, it ruined her day and she almost got kicked out of school.

Mercy doesn't do much. Although she has a job, she stays home and tries to kill herself or goes out with Warren. You can't imagine how much I hate Warren.

"You can't sleep here." Irving's man slaps me in the face.

"Do you have a cousin named, Warren?" I mumble.

Irving gets off the table and kisses his man; I didn't catch his name before I took the vicodin, the Ambien and the vodka. I'm useless right now...I should keep my mouth shut and walk out the door but...

"What's your name?"

"Carl." Irving interrupts. "You need to go."

I'm tired of being pushed around so I pull my Glock out. I'm fucking wasted...and Bruce Lee does some fucking trick kung fu move. His trick kung fu move is gently taking a gun out of the hands of an inebriated man's hands. I'm pathetic. He drops the magazine out of the grip and empties the chamber. He hands the bullets over to Irving and tucks the gun back into my suit coat.

"Sugar, my name is Ed." He taps me on the ass as he guides me out the door. Ed walks me to my car. I unlock the door and fall inside.

"You could sleep in your car if you want but this is Santa Ana. I would drive home, if I were you." He tries to kiss me and I try to punch him. One of us was far more successful. I drive home ashamed I could not have stopped his advances. Trick kung fu...ancient Chinese secret. I don't really remember how I wound up on the couch next to Joy but I did.

Chapter 6

It is six thirty in the morning and the local morning news is on.

“We have some breaking news from the San Fernando Valley, Tom Fields on location.” The very attractive newswoman says. Joy’s head is in my lap...I’m not sure I want to disturb her. A funny looking man comes on the screen.

“Patricia, most people know that the San Fernando Valley is the porn capital of the world. Yesterday this was the set of one of those films. And today one of the stars a Phil Felatio, his real name was John Sanchez. Patricia, I can’t discuss the details on air but they have been leaked onto the internet. Back to you.”

“In other news the US government and pushed forward its Eugenics program into the second phase. This week thousands of mentally challenged and psychotic people are being euthanized. This comes after the success with the euthanasia of America’s indigent population. The homelessness rate is at an all time low.”

I click the TV off. Phil Felatio, that name sounds familiar, not just because I watch a lot of porn but...I cradle Joy’s head and sneak off the couch so I don’t wake her. She looks like an angel.

I get ready for work. Starr is asleep and Mercy is gone somewhere...anywhere...I don’t care where. I come out of the shower to find Starr in our bed opening her eyes.

“Have a good day at work.” She says as she falls back to sleep.

I’m sitting in the parking lot at work under a tree where no one can see me. I’m smoking speed. I need some before I go in. I don’t have the patience for patients, today. I walk inside with my head down hoping no one will notice me for at least the next hour or so. Luck is not with me.

“Carl.” Dr Clein stops me as I pass her office. I walk into her office and sit in a chair right of the door. I’m doing my best not

to grind my teeth or fidget. These are telltale signs of methamphetamine use. I start to twiddle my thumbs. I am fucking in for she knows and she is going to fire my ass because I was just smoking speed in the parking lot.

“Carl, do you have any idea why I asked you in here today.” I kind of nod, shake my head and shrug at the same time. I nearly fall out of my chair into the hallway. When all of a sudden she starts to sing...

“Happy...” Fuck it’s my birthday. And through the door walk in four of my co-workers one is holding a cake for me. I need to get out of here...I’m sketching and this is all just a little too much to handle and I need to check on the Phil Felatio thing. Kathy is holding my cake.

Wait, wait...wait. Everyone knows that Kathy is a klutz. I stick out my foot oh so deviously. No one will be the wiser. And wait for it...and down she goes. She hits her head on the desk but the cake absorbed most of the impact...out the door I go.

While the others deal with Kathy’s concussion, I run to my office to check on the Felatio thing. It seems that the whole affair is detailed on a free porn site. That’s fucking weird.

It seems the whole thing is an interview with one of the forensic scientists:

“Sometime during the evening Mr. Sanchez was given an anticoagulant. Upon examining the body we found track marks, indicative of intravenous drug use. This is an unofficial theory of what happened: the deceased was using heroin. Somehow an anticoagulant was introduced. Mr. Sanchez fell asleep and sometime later was placed on the toilet in the master bedroom. His penis was removed while he was incapacitated. The efficacy of the heroin and the anticoagulant led to body being drained of all blood into the toilet. It seems that his genitals were found ironically in a jar of pickles.”

The website went onto include a filmography. This guy was in three of the thirty “Happy” movies. My balls drop. Movies

include Happy Trails, a western, Happy Accidents and Happy Halloween. What the fuck.

Pure Meth is purple...as it is cut or diluted it turns white. Suppliers use either baby aspirin or baby laxative called Mannitol. Mannitol is used clinically to reduce acutely raised intracranial pressure until more definitive treatment can be applied, e.g., after head trauma. But it still makes you shit.

Dr. Clein comes into my office as I close the browser on my desk top computer.

“Happy birthday, Carl. Why did you come in on your birthday?”

I don't answer. I just look at her as she backs out of the room.

On my desk is a nugget of pure purple. My boss didn't notice it, since it is smaller than my pinky finger nail. Irving gives it to me pure instead of cutting it. He has a deal worked out with the cookers...I need to get over to the hospital.

One of the things I do for Irving is provide him with Mannitol. I walk into the UCI medical center. I often sell to the janitorial and housekeeping personal. Some of these are women who've just given birth and want to lose some of the baby weight quick. I come into make a quick buck and Jorge on the night shift tells me he knows a guy at the coroner's office in the Valley.

Jorge and I smoke speed in the laundry room closet before I head over to visit his friend. The linen is soft and bright. Everything has a fresh smell that soon disappears as I light the nugget of speed.

I walk out to my car and drive to the Valley.

Jorge's guy is the LA County coroner. As I drove through the valley I got a call on my cell phone asking me to go into LA. Right now, I'm looking down at Phil's body.

"You see multiple track marks indicating habitual narcotic use." The coroner points to Phil's armpits.

I nod my head. The coroner breaks out the toxicology report.

"Heparin..." he says as he closes the file. "Heparin was the anticoagulant used by the killer. The drug could have been laced into the heroin. That is my guess."

"Are there any leads any prints any forensic data..."

"I wouldn't know." He says as he closes the drawer. My hands are slimy and I find a wet nap as I walk out the door. It's probably just hand sweat from smoking speed but I have a thing about dirty hands. More importantly Starr has a thing about dirty hands.

As I get to my car, my phone rings. It's Starr...

"Carl, I'll be out of town for a couple of days..." Starr hangs up.

I get home to an empty house. Starr left a bottle of whiskey and two of my Vicodin tablets on the coffee table. The pills are in a prescription bottle with a label that has my name on them. At noon on the Friday of my birthday I turn on the local news. I take the pills and wash it down with some whiskey.

I must have blacked out for the last couple of days. The TV is on and it seems to be Sunday afternoon.

"Two more men in what is being called the Willy whacker murders were found this morning in the valley." The reporter announces as I pass out again.

"Joy must have been busy the couple last nights." I mumble as I slip into exhaustion...slip into the ether of a dreamless sleep. There is no way Joy could have killed three men, let alone one, she doesn't have it in her.

Chapter 7

Warren is in my house...Why is Warren in my apartment? Mercy must be home. I'm sitting on the couch. The TV says it's Sunday night. I slip into my room before Mercy notices that I'm awake.

The next day I'm sitting in front of my computer. The two men died in very similar ways this weekend. Dirty Sanchez and Roman Helmet they were also intravenous drug users. I called my contact at the coroner's office and he said he found track marks covered up with concealer. They were together in the same house one on the toilet as before and the other in the adjacent bath tub. To keep Mr. Sanchez from falling over, the killer used two leather belts, one black and the other tan to hold the body to the tank.

The members were placed into hotdog buns and placed in the microwave. I need to make friends with the LAPD...I never thought I would say that. I need to know if I'm living with a killer. I need to know if I should be afraid of Joy taking the cock to the chopping block instead of being enamored with her smile.

I'm chopping little lines of purple on my desk, the door is closed. I'll be up for the next couple of days but I need to figure something out, I'm worried about Joy. I needn't be. If she could do something like this then she could take care of herself. I take one big snort. I wash it down with a coke and a Snickers bar I'm going to need the sugar.

Before I lose my appetite altogether I head over to the coffee shop and get a sandwich and some hot coco. Before I know it I'm driving north on the 5 freeway, headed for Los Angeles.

Driving while high through L.A. is a bad way to make friends on the LAPD homicide division. I'm filled with bad ideas. I would head over to skid row but it is dead, literally. I get off the freeway at Third Street and decide to turn around and rethink what I need to do, come up with a plan.

Slowly, I drive east on Third Street...although I'm not hungry King Taco still sounds good. I get a couple of tacos and

some horchata and watch the sunset in the west. My thoughts are never far from Joy, thoughts spiraling around the idea of how someone so sweet could kill her costars. Where could she have gotten the Heparin? Who would give her it? Why? All these questions floating through my mind...my mind never goes far from Joy.

I get home and Starr left me a note and a thermos of coffee; she wants me to check out a neighborhood on her route for a house to pillage. I'll be up all night so I drive over there. I'm worried as I approach the beachside gated community...

"Sir," the guy in the booth says. I know this guy I just can't place him. "Do you have a..." drool pours out of his open mouth. He must know me too.

"I dropped my..."

"Man, go ahead." He interrupts me. I fail to hesitate and drive through as he directs me to.

He looked like he was from Santa Ana, maybe Irving is his connect. There are an infinite number of maybes in this world, I will worry less about them and more about the address Starr gave me. As a park a couple house down, I notice the strangest thing...The doors of the homes are open. I don't mean unlocked, wide open. And people are walking in and out. Tents are set up in some of the yards. Have some of the homeless migrated to gated communities? Is this the refuge they seek like the Frank family in Amsterdam? The filth of the world taking in everything abhorrent, every reason they moved into gated communities had to do with keeping the poor out and themselves clean and safe from the impoverished, those people responsible for criminal activities. Now as night fell redemption came to those who days before cried "kill the poor". The government listened and many regretted and wished they could have said "kill poverty", instead.

The street was bathed in yellow from the street lamps and camping lanterns. I got out of my car and mingled within the crowd. This would never be a place I could pull off a job...I hardly thought Starr should come here to sell that shit makeup but we

need money for things; for this and that...for drugs, mostly for drugs. I opened the thermos and realized it was not coffee inside and I was probably not from Starr. Joy had made some hot coco for me I gave it to a young mother holding her a little girl no more than five. The girl was wearing a set of pink footie pajamas...They looked too new. Too new to be from the Goodwill or the Salvation Army thrift store. I looked at my watch it was midnight and everyone was zipping up their tents or going into their home but none shut the door.

Drug addicts often have a moment or several moments they refer to as a moment of clarity. A time, an instant where everything becomes clear to them what they should do and where there life will go...the only thing that came to me at this time was I could walk into any of these homes and walk off with there stuff I wouldn't need Starr to distract anyone. I could just go in while they were asleep. Rich people keep valuables in safes and many are dumb so they don't use combinations they use keys. Keys left hanging on walls in the entry way. Keys left in crystal bowls on end tables or in a foyer. This place is ripe for the pilfering. I got into my car and drove home.

Maybe this would be the day I would stop going to see Irving, Maybe this would be the day I stopped robbing peoples home...Maybe I would make an accurate diagnosis instead of hanging onto my bosses coattails. These were the maybes of right now but my mind didn't go to far from Joy and her murderous rampage of cock amputation and bloodletting...

What kind of girl makes you hot coco and then chops off someone's manhood and places it into the freezer next to the chocolate covered bananas? Who? I just hope to god Warren is not with Mercy tonight. If I'm going to be up, why must I go home?

I get off the freeway at Carmenita I drive to an AM/PM and to buy a pack of smokes. The guy behind the counter touches my hand when he gives me the receipt...this is the most action I've had since I touched Joy's head. Starr has been sort of absent. I would be worried but she can take care of herself. I have faith in her.

I get back onto the freeway, northbound interstate five. People always tell you never to deal with a middleman but when you are a drug addict your connections middle or direct are always needed. What you can't say to one...the other will tell you. I can't go to the cops for fear they may arrest Joy for murder or at least conspiracy. The next best thing to a detective is a reporter...it's sort of the same thing. I'll go over to the LA Times and see if I can make a connection.

I am driving the surface streets once I get to Third Street. I've been chain smoking. It is four in the morning. I smoke a couple more cigarettes and go inside.

I smell like smoke...the best thing is a little cologne and clean hands. I head over to the restrooms. I go to wash my hands and notice something completely strange; three knobs on the washbasin. Red, blue and purple...I get the red is hot and the blue is cold but purple. Why do they need a third knob for warm? I need to look closer to make sure it is warm. In little letters it says: warm. Seems like an utter redundancy. Cold and hot equal warm...maybe the plumber likes the Lakers too much.

After washing my hands with warm water, I start poking around to find someone associated with the murders. Not a witness per se but a reporter, an investigator. Someone with the smarts and certain connections I can't make right at this moment.

I take the elevator...what I should have done was to look at the directory and find a list of reporters or something.

Meandering, as I often do, I see on the second floor. There is a man walking down the hall. He is reading a stack of papers. It is his copy, of his story. I hear him mutter to himself but I can't hear what he is saying.

"Sir?"

"Yes..." He answers. "Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for someone who can help me, anyone who is connected with the Willy Whacker murders."

"I'm actually writing the story."

"Is there any way I could ask you for some of inside info...some forensic data." I stammer.

"Like some leads I may have been given?"

"Yeah."

"It's all just speculation but they believe it is someone in the industry." He stated as he walked away. "That's all I have now come back again."

"What's your name?"

"There's my office right there." He pointed to the left with his right hand. "The name is Larry White."

Larry walked toward the stairs and I exited by elevator. It worried me that Joy may be implicated at some point in time. But in my heart I was sure she had done nothing wrong.

My intention was to drive home but as they say: 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions.' I drove and drove just to think of some way some way I could help fix things. And I listened to music and talked to myself. Thinking out loud, thinking just to hear my own voice. Thinking because that is all I had left and I was confused and high.

I had to cut the shit out...cut out the thing I enjoyed to focus on the case...focus on the task at hand. I needed sleep and I prayed that Warren was not at my house. I could only imagine the torture he was putting poor, poor Mercy through. The chick was a cunt but no one deserves Warren. Well maybe someone deserves Warren but not Mercy.

Inside Mercy there is happiness lurking. I need to get home before Starr wakes to find that I'm out all night. I went home and I find her asleep. Sometimes she snores...it's cute in a way. I feign sleep and think about Joy's possible predicament.

Warren isn't here, thank God. I went to work the next day. And I tried not to smoke, snort or do anything with speed...I was on edge the entire day.

My boss came into talk but the discussion never happened. She just watched me. The watching...the kind of watching a maternal figure would do. She walked out of the room with a smile.

I was doing my best not to use drugs that day...not to escape from the reality of my life. I tried to do more research on the case. I need to wait a day or so before paying a visit to the police. There were no calls that I knew of so I left a couple hours early.

I wanted to help Starr pull a job before it got to dark. I drove back to the apartment to find Warren with Mercy I knew if this was going I and Starr should be nowhere near them. And the foyer was way too close for me.

Chapter 8

I'm sitting at the table in the morning. Joy pushes the newspaper toward me. On the front page was more news about a possible lead in the 'Willy Whacker' murders. The paper did not tell who the suspects were but only that some of the suspects were in the porn industry.

"What do we do, Joy?" I get up and place my cereal bowl in the dishwasher. She is silent. I storm out of the house leaving my gun locked in a case. No one has the key except for me.

All the murders took place in the valley so I went to the police station there. The LAPD wasn't the most accommodating but I made the most of my five minutes in the station. When you walk into a police station seeking answers you should ask question instead of..."I have a possible lead on the 'cock chopper' murders". Well, I was immediately arrested.

I was thrown into the back of a cruiser and driven downtown. I wasn't privy to the conversation seeing that I was knocked out at the time. The officers assumed anyone asking questions about or having leads on the murders was the murderer and should be beaten just short of death.

It's never that they don't want to kill you. It's that death would be too good for a man who would chop off another man's manhood or kill a police officer. I felt the same way and I was concerned that I was living with a woman who could do this to former, for lack of better words, 'lovers'.

The thing about Miranda Rights is...often they are not read to you until you get to where they want to take you and today LA's finest took me to a holding cell in the Los Angeles central jail lovingly referred to as the twin towers. My face was bloody and droplets rained on the concrete from an open wound on my face. I was a mess. I was beaten and bloody and in a jail cell with five drug addicts and one drunk. The smell gave the odd bird away.

The junky was asleep while the tweakers walked around and argued with each other, the jailors, the sleeping junky or the

wall when no one else would listen. I let the blood drain out of my nose as the arresting officer spoke...

"You have the right to remain silent..."

I did remain silent as the blood ran onto the concrete.

"You have the right to an attorney..."

One would have to be provided for me.

"Do you understand these rights as they have been read to you?"

"I do." I whimpered. He walked out of the cell and slammed the door closed. After that the whole day went to shit.

"What do you know about the 'cock chopper'...Are you the 'cock chopper'?"

"I'm not the guy but I know a woman who..." Did I mention the whole day went to shit? I wasn't going to be released soon and Joy was being arrested by the time her name left my lips. For some reason a woman would need an accomplice and I seemed like a likely candidate. I had access to the anticoagulant and narcotics.

What about Warren...What about Warren I mumbled through the blood dripping out my mouth. They seemed to think I was saying "what about a warrant" but I was not.

I assume after the LAPD questioned Joy they released us both. They released her into my care. This seems very strange that they would release nice, even-tempered, quiet Joy into my professional care but that is the lie...there has never been anything professional about the care I give to Joy.

The ride home was interesting...the drive from the Valley to Orange was unlike any drive I have ever or maybe will ever have with Joy, Mercy and Starr.

Chapter 9

When I met Joy her personality was already fractured. When I and her Starr personality began dating and sleeping together it was because I fell in love with her as she was not as I wanted her to be. Life is this way sometimes...often we see perfection and come to understand flaws. I only saw Joy yelling at me and had to comb through her personalities.

As I drove home Joy, Starr and Mercy yelled at me...they were never the 'Willy Whacker' and at that time they sounded as though they were in harmony. How could I think this and how could I think that, came pure out of her mouth. I never felt so ashamed of trying to help someone as I did on that forty-five minute drive. At some point in time a miracle happened Joy went silent or at least I stopped listening. Her mouth moved but I only thought about who killed those porn stars. Was it a disgruntled fluffer? Someone yelled at someone because they didn't clean their feet properly? I thought and thought but my mind fell back to hating Warren more than ever and now maybe you understand why.

I dropped Joy off at out apartment and drove away. I drove to the desert and watched the sunrise over the desert the next morning. I slept cold and alone in my car. I can't say I was the first time.

The scabs on my face fell onto my shirt as I tried to rub the sleep off my face. The sun rose and the wind blew and I sat on the hood of my car. I smoked a camel non-filter and thought about how I could make things better which really means how am I going to fuck it all up, again.

While we, Joy and I, were being questioned by the LAPD the 'cock chopper' struck again...the paper stopped listing the screen names of these men. It was becoming too vulgar. I have been clean for like a week now and have done more damage than good and my schizophrenic...sorry, multiple personality disorder girlfriend was sleep with her other man, Warren.

As I drove I thought about my friend Warren, the great nephew of Bruce Lee and how this guy could easily have done what was done to those men.

Motive...What would be the motive for killing Mercy's co-stars? Think...think...Maybe, some sort of sick revenge against the industry for Joy's fractured personality. Joy is as much to blame...and I left her alone with the murderer. Have I ever mentioned that I am an idiot?

Driving home I weave in and out of traffic on the 10 freeway as I merge onto the 60 and then finally the 91. It was a stroke of luck that I did not get pulled over but cops tend not to pull over people in nerd mobiles. I would have called 911 but I've already been arrested once today and I think they would write off what I say as utter nonsense. I call as I hit the 91 freeway. Anyway, what could I do; I left my gun at home.

I exited the freeway with as much fury as my Civic could put out. For the record most Honda Civics have little to no fury. Warren on the other hand has fury...

Dressed in a little black dress with a black wig looking a lot like Joy, Warren has fury. Lying on the sidewalk in handcuffs Warren has absolutely no fury he is just some asshole impersonating a woman to cut the genitals off of other men. Why? That is a question befitting the wise old owl from the Tootsie Pop commercials. I'm guessing it won't take many licks to get to the answer.

Chapter 10

Sometime after the trial...sometime before Joy left...We sat and spoke about Warren. Somewhere during our conversation she shifted from my love to my patient and back again and I assume she was counseling me to some degree. Trying to help me reconcile my fractured personality, it seems that my fractured personality was far more apparent.

It may take years in appeals for the courts to have their justice against this man who tried to fix a woman by killing her former coworkers, if I should even dare to use this word. Love is a strange business and what she did was doubly strange...but what of love. It seems I sound much like one of my psychotic patients these days. I guess this all goes back to Aesop and his fable of the donkey and the mule...it seems that these days I count myself lucky to be confused with the psychotics.

"Carl?" Joy asked in her quiet way. "Will this ever go away." She asked pointing at her head. "Will I ever not be crazy, Carl"

I kissed her and said: "All the best people are crazy."

Two weeks later I drove her to the airport. Two weeks after that I left the house for the first time in two months. Bring up the past at the trial was difficult. Difficult in a way where you are the one who is brought in for question by the same police that beat you senseless...we often make mistakes but my getting involved with Joy would never be counted in that category of my life.

I would be wonderful to say that the people in the gated community came out of hiding into a bright world full of hope and security but they did not. But miracles sometimes happen...I can't say that anymore. I now live in that gated community. The patients I see often have no place to go after beginning treatment and so they come home with me. It seems that taking is only a bad habit if you fail to take care of them.